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## In the wings of the ethnography stage: Michel Leiris' scientific pursuit and existential quest

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This paper analyses the attitude of a French surrealist writer and ethnographer, Michel Leiris, who accompanied the expedition led by Marcel Griaule, from Dakar to Djibouti (1931–33), as the archivist-secretary of this official “mission”. In fact, Leiris participated actively in the ethnographic activities of the team. He kept a detailed account and recorded the methods used to acquire the objects collected. These methods were not always honest, but Leiris attempts to exonerate the team by pointing out that they were acting for the advancement of science and knowledge. Later, he ascribed ethnography an important role: to revalorise cultures which had been unjustly underrated. Leiris expected that his participation in the expedition would also allow him to encounter a different reality and meet the Other, hence to reduce his introspective tendencies and existential malaise. Realising these expectations were unfulfilled, he chose for his book the title *Phantom Africa*, which denied “full existence” to that continent. However, his account is of great interest to us because it reveals the mentality and attitude of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century surrealist ethnographer. **Key words:** *Afrique fantôme*, Michel Leiris, travel writing,

### Introduction

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ethnography was not a well established discipline. It was not even well defined, without any recognised texts, methodology, university chairs, etc. But it was a science of human “races” which, in James Clifford’s words, abandoned “the distinction between high and low culture” and offered “a levelling and a reclassification of familiar categories” (Clifford 1988: 129). Exploring the unknown, it “denoted a radical questioning of norms, and an appeal to the exotic, the paradoxical, the *insolite*” (Clifford 1988: 129). For these reasons, it appealed greatly to the French surrealists of the 1920s and 1930s, who were searching beyond the known, given and familiar reality, for another reality, a “sur-reality” mysterious, rich, unwonted and what the surrealist André Breton deems to be *la vraie vie* (the true life) (Breton 1952).

It is therefore easy to understand why the French surrealist writer Michel Leiris was keen to participate in the expedition from Dakar to Djibouti, led by his friend, the ethnographer Marcel Griaule. Leiris was to be the “secretary-archivist” of the team. In fact, he also participated actively in the ethnographic activities of the group, then

starting his training as an ethnographer, eventually becoming a full time ethnographer. The expedition lasted almost two years, from May 1931 to February 1933, during which time, Leiris kept a very detailed journal, totalling 533 pages. Leiris' diary is of great interest to us not only because it recounts the activities of a team of ethnographers in Africa in the 1930s, describing how they collected information and artefacts, but also because it gives us an insight into the mind of a particular surrealist-ethnographer, his feelings, thoughts and attitude towards the African people, his dreams and his fears.

This paper will investigate the team's activities, as recounted by Leiris and examine the French surrealist's expectations and attitude during the "mission".

### **The mission**

Marcel Griaule's "mission", underwritten by the French legislature was the very first ethnographic expedition undertaken officially on behalf of the government. It opened the era of great French ethnographic fieldwork. Until then, those researchers who had founded and enriched the science – E. Durkheim, M. Mauss, L. Lévy-Bruhl – had done so virtually without leaving their desks. The term "mission" is significant. It places the expedition in the realm of officialdom and within the framework of colonialism, immediately suggesting the "confident gestures of a stable subject who conquers, instructs, converts, describes, admires, represents [...] other people and their worlds" (Clifford 1988: 168). It functions as an "all-purpose term for any redemptive colonial errand, whether military, evangelical, educational, medical or ethnographic" (Clifford 1988: 168).

Yet, the surrealists – Breton, Bataille, Desnos, Artaud, Leiris – had always stood firmly against colonialism. Leiris had even once been arrested by the police, as he was haranguing a crowd from an open window at a banquet given in honour of the poet Saint Pol Roux – he was denouncing France's colonial policy in Morocco. The surrealists deemed Africa to have been handed over and lost to zealous missionaries, bovine army officers, inept administrators and incapable colonial officials. At the time of the great Exposition Coloniale (1931) in Paris, organised by the French authorities to exalt the concept of "La Grande France" and to promote nationalism, the surrealist slogan "Do not visit the Colonial Exhibition" reminded people that Africa was a place of exploitation, oppression, forced labour and daily killing. Although in 1931, Leiris had already distanced himself from the surrealists' group, he still shared their views on colonialism. So why does he join Griaule's "mission" and support this official colonial venture? What kind of benefit did he expect to obtain from this expedition?

### **Reasons for Leiris' involvement**

First, ethnography offered him the chance to encounter another reality and another humanity – to meet the Other. Also, he had personal reasons, which he reveals in the Preamble to the third edition of this diary published in 1981 (*Afrique fantôme*, 3).<sup>1</sup> He had hoped that scientific observation in a remote land, and real contact with other peoples would transform him and cure his depression. Trying to understand the Other would possibly bring oblivion of the Self. Also, he was hoping that the many activities of the ethnographer – collecting, labelling, classifying, informing, etc. – would help him to overcome his obsessions.

This journal, intended to be the logbook of the expedition, metamorphosed into a private diary. Leiris justifies his subjectivity. He states in a project for a preface which appears in the middle of the book: “Writing subjectively, I increase the value of my testimony by showing that at every moment, I am fully aware of my worth as a witness” (213).<sup>2</sup> “Openly exhibiting the personal coefficient allows the calculation of error. By pushing subjectivity to the extreme, one reaches objectivity” and gains “maximum truth” (213).<sup>3</sup> Thus, his perception of the Other and his attitude towards the people and his work are often coloured by his state of mind which he openly communicates to his readers.

### **The team's tactics**

Not only does Leiris write about the customs, dances, crafts, religious ceremonies of the populations amongst whom the expedition is collecting and not only does he describe their utensils, musical instruments, objects of worship, etc., but he also frankly recounts the activities of the team and the methods they use for collecting objects, so introducing us to the wings of the ethnography stage.

Most often, objects collected by the group are bought from villagers. But some ritual articles cannot be purchased, so two possibilities arise. Sometimes, an implicit understanding is reached, an arrangement which will allow the former owners to save face. Thus, in Mali, some ritual masks which cannot be sold, are “requisitioned” by the French mission. The dancers who give the masks to the ethnographers have no choice in the face of an official order. Quite independently, these dancers receive presents – not to pay for the masks, but nominally as tokens of friendship (121) – and the two operations are officially divorced from each other. But if the ethnographers cannot obtain the objects they desire from the villagers by any other means, Leiris reveals that they resort to theft. Thus, the inhabitants of Yougo Dogolon refuse “with awe” to sell some rain statuettes which Griaule wants to buy, because to remove these objects from the village would be tantamount “to taking away the life of the country” (125).<sup>4</sup> So Griaule is told by a youth, who is almost in tears at the idea of the calamities this impious gesture would unleash. Leiris then recounts how he conceals one of

these statuettes in his shirt. Later, it is hidden inside a large closed green umbrella and thus surreptitiously removed.

When they encounter difficulties during the day, they act at night. Thus, in Sanga, they have noticed a beautiful wooden statue. So, "Schaeffner and I decide that tonight, we will go to fetch it" writes Leiris that day (128).<sup>5</sup>

They set precedents for their African helpers who emulate them. So two young Africans working for them spirit away the fibre costumes from the cave of the masks. In Bla (Mali), Griaule becomes irritated by the lengthy and complicated negotiations necessary to acquire the Kono, the most sacred fetish and pivot of religious life for the villagers. So, while waiting, he first helps himself to two flutes which he hides in his boots and then rearranges the objects in the cave to conceal the flutes' disappearance (82). Then, since the villagers do not want to part with the Kono, he threatens them with the police who, he claims, are hidden in his truck, if the fetish is not handed to him in exchange for 10 francs. "Ghastly blackmail" (82),<sup>6</sup> writes Leiris, who describes the terror and the panic caused in the village by this spoliation. All the villagers flee in horror as the ethnographers leave the deserted village in deadly silence, taking the Kono with them. "The vapours of this sacrilege rise to our heads, and in one jump, we find ourselves propelled onto a plane much above ourselves" (82).<sup>7</sup> Before leaving Dyabougou, they steal another Kono by surreptitiously entering the consecrated hut in which it is kept. "My heart beats hard inside my chest, as, since yesterday's scandal, I perceive the enormity of the deed we commit" reveals Leiris (83).<sup>8</sup>

Further east, in Abyssinia, their deeds are equally objectionable. In regions which have been Christianised, they replace church paintings with copies quickly executed by a member of the team and then take the originals with them. When they discover they cannot smuggle the nation's ritual objects and church articles out of the country and because they fear being caught red handed by the customs with an altar piece they wanted to take out, they destroy the evidence by burning the altar piece, after having copied the motif which decorated it. The discovery of the original by the customs officials "would certainly have provoked a massacre" (469),<sup>9</sup> states Leiris. The inventory they are requested to present to the customs is totally false. In the secret compartments of false bottomed cases and trunks, they hide books of magic, old parchments, secret documents such as records of the census numbering slaves and possessed inhabitants, which the Abyssinian authorities do not wish to be disseminated. They roll up paintings in skins, and wrap them to make them look like other packages. In order to hide a very old painted triptych, they cover it with sheets of paper, on which the very same motifs have been drawn and roughly painted by Roux, one of the team. It will pass as a mere copy of the genuine article (473), which in fact, it is covering.

### **Leiris' attitude**

We stated earlier that one of the reasons why Leiris had joined Griaule's expedition was to try and alleviate his existential malaise, while giving himself wholeheartedly to ethnological activities. So, he questions informants and labels and classifies specimens. Relief and excitement result from the intoxicating effects of this scientific research. Like a detective on a trail, he notes his pleasure when discovering in an abandoned village, a rope which had been used to tie the sacrificial sheep offered to sacred crocodiles. He feels the thrill of a sleuth led from one clue to another, from one enigma to another, uncovering the trail of truth (52). The success of the team in purchasing a large mask enlivens his day (60). His boredom and malaise disappear with the powerful excitement caused by the theft of cult objects. While stealing one particular Kono, he notes that he feels himself living fully and his heart beats hard. When there are no more Konos to be stolen in one area, he is regretful, but not, he reveals, for the same reason as Griaule. "What excites me", he writes, "is the idea of profanation" (84).<sup>10</sup> He feels that he is then lifted onto the place of the Gods, or is on a par with demons.

Sometimes, however, Leiris' moral conscience is awakened. When he becomes aware of the degree of inviolability of the white man, he is filled with shame and disgust. Thus, one day, when he enters a hut with a knife to cut away a Kono from the ropes that bind it to the wall, he becomes aware that two men – in fact not threatening at all, he adds – are following him. "I realise with amazement which after a while turns to disgust, that you feel jolly sure of yourself when you are a white man and you're holding a knife in you hand" (83).<sup>11</sup> But he does not question the act itself which he justifies morally, expressing the feelings of his colleagues which are for the advancement of science and knowledge, so exonerating the actions of the research workers. They believe firmly they are acting for a good cause (3). Leiris clears the ethnographers of any blame. Is spoliation with a scientific objective still spoliation? These stolen objects, left to their legitimate proprietors would deteriorate, whereas at the Trocadéro or at the Musée de l'Homme, in Paris, they will be preserved for ever.

One of the tasks of the "mission" was to enrich the French National Collection, and enrich it, they did! They brought back a booty of "3 500 ethnographic objects, [...] six thousand photographs, a large collection of Abyssinian paintings, three hundred manuscripts and amulets, notations of thirty languages and dialects and hundreds of recordings, 'ethnographic observations', botanical specimens, and so on" (Clifford 1988: 137).

Unlike the writer André Malraux, Leiris never questioned the value of exhibiting these objects out of context, torn away from the social and cultural milieu which had conceived them and later labelled as "African art" by European intellectuals, writers such as Guillaume Apollinaire or André Breton, and painters such as Picasso. Still, some were conscious of this desecration. In 1955, two famous film-makers, Chris Marker

and Alain Resnais, showed African statues in their film, *Les statues meurent aussi* (Statues also die), which had been taken away from their milieu and displayed in European museums as *objets d'art*. The film depicts how the statues lost their meaning and were “mummified” as soon as they were separated from their native environment. This film, which denounced the brutality of colonialism, was confiscated by the French Government and held for ten years before being released (Diawara 1992: 23). The writer André Malraux, later French Minister of Culture, when visiting the Musée du Trocadéro, was sickened by the sight of dust covered masses of African masks, statuettes, cult objects, etc. in that dark, dank place. “A flea market”, he exclaimed. “You could only see the Abyssinian icons if you crouched and used the light of a cigarette lighter,” he recalls with horror (Malraux 1976: 303).<sup>12</sup> But at that stage, Leiris was not concerned with the ultimate display of the collected objects.

Sometimes, villagers complain to the authorities. Once a telegram from the French Governor requests Griaule to hand back a mask “requisitioned” in San, which its owners reclaim (84). So the mask is given back immediately. Leiris simply exonerates the activities of the team by showing that the French authorities behave in a worse way: “It is easy to answer those officials who criticise our audacity in our dealings with the Blacks, for as long as Africa is submitted to a regime as iniquitous as that of taxation, compulsory dues and military service, they cannot be too particular about objects taken away, or bought too cheaply” (89).<sup>13</sup>

However some of the actions of the team, considered as misdemeanours by the local authorities, do have a humanitarian objective. Thus, in Abyssinia, they contravene the laws of the country and buy slaves with the intention of freeing them, on leaving the country. This causes them a great deal of trouble on their departure.

The disclosures Leiris made in his Journal provoked Marcel Griaule’s anger and strained the relationship between the two men after its publication. As Leiris later admitted in his *Five Ethnographical Studies* (Leiris 1950), the ethnographer undermines his own survival if he speaks too frankly and divulges the secrets of his art and actions. He must choose between ethnography and truth and sometimes, truth must be sacrificed to avoid diplomatic incidents, because ethnographic missions are usually financed by governments and are answerable to the official powers which sponsor them.

### **Leiris and the inhabitants**

Leiris’ diary is of interest because it reveals the attitude of a surrealist-ethnographer towards the inhabitants of the region he traverses. In spite of his desire to encounter and know the Other, while in West Africa, Leiris does not have close contact with the inhabitants of the regions through which he is travelling. He finds them uncouth and stupid and often loses patience with his informants. Their inability to understand,

and what he calls their blunders, irritate him. Their contradictions drive him to hysterics. Furious one day, because one of the servants has gone swimming instead of folding his master's bed, he violently kicks his dish of grilled *shoumbra* (chick peas) which go flying (269). He even strikes a villager because he finds that the man does not work energetically enough, in spite of his physical strength. When one of the informants leaves him in the lurch, he writes: "These Blacks, they are all the same! There is only one way to make them function! The cane!" (172).<sup>14</sup> But he retracts these words when he remembers the shocking treatment which victimises the Africans: lack of job security, harassment, forced labour and prison, "often for crimes which are crimes only in our eyes" (173),<sup>15</sup> writes Leiris. And he exclaims: "These men, perhaps not particularly likable, but neither worse nor more stupid than anyone else; how shameful it is to treat them in this way under the guise of civilisation!" (173).<sup>16</sup>

As the team advances eastwards, Leiris' contacts with the natives change. He loses his indifference and coldness. In Abyssinia, he wants to penetrate and understand the mentality of the populations amongst which the team is collecting data; so he participates in their rites. In the Gondar region, where the team spends several months, he engulfs himself in the villagers' beliefs – doubtlessly, once again a way of forgetting his malaise and mitigating the effects of his depression. He loses himself in the world of the *zars*, those spirits who keep close to human beings, protecting, punishing them and intervening constantly in their affairs. Now, he is no longer motivated by the mere scientific curiosity of the investigator. He participates intensely in the rites and the sacrifices of the *zars* and immerses himself in the supernatural atmosphere which prevails in Gondar. One day, after he has "received" blood – he drank the blood of a sacrificed cockerel and was anointed with it – he feels "very separate, very holy and chosen" (443).<sup>17</sup> The next morning, astonished by his voracity the previous night, when he realises that he almost entirely devoured the two large chickens he has offered as a sacrifice to the *zars*, he knows that he was the "horse", or receptacle, of the *zar* – he was filled and possessed by the *zar*. "It must have been the *zar* who ate, not the 'horse'; I could never credit myself with such a capacity for food", he writes (443).<sup>18</sup> He is indignant when he thinks another sacrifice he offered for a woman was not conducted strictly according to the rites. He fears her *zar* would not descend on her while she is drinking the sacrificial blood. But he is reassured when the son of this woman provides proofs that the sacrifice was indeed conducted according to the rules.

Only once does Leiris question the authenticity of these rites. Could all this be a spectacle produced for the benefit of the *Frendjis* (the French)? he wonders. "Poor *awolyas*, what desperate efforts, and what toil and sweat to reach their trance state, in their histrionic frenzy!" (401).<sup>19</sup> But Leiris never doubts the *zars'* reality. For this surrealist, the invisible world of the spirits, of the *zars*, is just as real as the visible world which surrounds him. The problem – and the danger – for this man avid for



novelty, mystery and escapism, is that everything eventually becomes too familiar, and thus, banal. “The *zars* have become my family members” he regretfully writes (401).<sup>20</sup> This feeling brings boredom again. The fantastic becomes worn, trite and commonplace, and he relapses into his depression.

### The myth of Africa

Leiris’ attitude differs greatly from that of many other European intellectuals who visited Africa at about the same time. They adhered to the evolutionist theory, then prevalent. The French writer André Gide, for instance, travelling in Congo and Chad, five years before Leiris, in 1926, had wanted to observe “mankind at the dawn of time” and “without civilisation” (Gide 1930: 21).<sup>21</sup> He had only conceded the Africans “a numb, stagnant mind, steeped in thick night, most of the time” (Gide 1954: 765).<sup>22</sup> Observing “the savage, the primitive” had allowed him, a “civilised man”, to know himself better, because “deeply buried under the sediments patiently laid by culture”, in “each of us”, he writes, “lies the ‘barbarian self’ which it is fascinating to discover in its original form” (Gide 1988: 35).<sup>23</sup> Thus, Gide did not grant the African “natives” amongst whom he was travelling, any spirituality, culture or religious beliefs. Going to Congo and to Chad, he was lured by the myth of a virgin Africa, a land and man before culture, where he would encounter *le bon sauvage*, the noble savage, unspoiled and close to nature.

It was the same search for a myth, that of a virgin Africa, which often prompted other travellers to visit those regions. Thus, the South African painter Irma Stern also travelling in Congo, was seeking, in the words of Patricia Davidson, “a place of romance and mystery”, “a paradise lost” (Davidson 1993: 34, 36), which she tried to capture in her paintings.

Leiris is also seeking a myth in Africa, which he finds in Abyssinia. The stifling heat, the devouring sun, the maddening wind of Gondar (225) belong to the myth of Africa and fulfil his expectations. Near Fachoda, he admires the natives, the Shillouks, “those splendid savages, so nonchalant, so unexpected and at the same time so astonishingly similar to those that one expects” (223).<sup>24</sup> Here, reality coincides with the myth. “At last, here is AFRICA” he writes in Gedaref, “the land of 50 degrees in the shade, convoys of slaves, cannibal feasts, skulls emptied of all that has been eaten, corroded and lost” (225).<sup>25</sup> In Gondar, the family of Malkam Ayyahou, whom he visits frequently, comes from another age. It is “a Biblical monument” (434)<sup>26</sup> and belongs to the myth. But unlike André Gide and the evolutionists, Leiris grants a strong spirituality to the people among whom he is collecting data. What is more, he respects their beliefs and even, immerses himself in them.

Other Europeans, understandably the missionaries, had no regard for the Africans’ religious creed. For instance, William Burton lived in Central Africa for more than 40



years and gathered an important collection of Luba masks and artefacts for the Department of Bantu Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He also left important ethnographic notes, photographs, water colours, paintings, etc. Although he acknowledges the spirituality of the people of Congo, and although he did agree they possessed an intricate set of traditions and customs within their religious creed, his only aim was to eradicate these beliefs, convert the “natives” and save their heathen souls. “His gaze persistently pierced the surface in order to penetrate beliefs that he hoped to alter” (Davidson 1993: 34). On the contrary, it seems that Leiris dreamt of some syncretic religion in which Christianity and Animism would be combined, of a fusion with the cosmos, a state which his “civilised” compatriots could no longer achieve.

### Conclusion

Although, from the ethnographer’s point of view, the expedition was a success and brought back treasured information and precious objects, for Leiris himself, this adventure in Africa ended in a double failure. On a personal level, his initial misgivings were well founded. His isolation and solitude had proved deleterious and had encouraged introspection. As he had suspected from the start, “travels do not change one. [...] Sadly, you stay what you always were” (181).<sup>27</sup> He had not been mistaken. From the beginning, he had feared that this involvement in ethnography might not be able to tear him from his dreamer’s subjectivity. He had remained the same anguished man – hence his discomfiture. It was this personal disappointment which had prompted the title he had chosen for his narrative on his return, *Afrique fantôme* – Phantom Africa, a title which denied “full existence” (3)<sup>28</sup> to that continent where, although he had found much, total deliverance had eluded him. Such was the explanation he gave for his title in the preamble to the third edition of the book (3). He had suffered a further disillusionment because the mythical Africa he thought he had discovered had masked the authentic Africa and its burning human problems. He had been incapable of seeing reality. That was the second and more serious failure, acknowledged in the Preface to his second edition of 1951. Leiris had hoped that the activities proper to the ethnographer would foster better communication with the people among whom he was travelling. But he discovers they remain “shadows” (532), for “Human Sciences remain a science and detached observation cannot, on its own, establish contact. Perhaps by definition, it implies exactly the opposite, because the mental attitude suited to the observer should be an impartial objectivity alien to any effusion of sentiment” (8).<sup>29</sup>

Only in Abyssinia did Leiris feel closer to the population. This was not, he explained, because its ancient Christianity drew it, culturally, closer to Europe, but because it was not a colony. There, he felt more in contact with the people, than in any

other country through which the team had travelled. "Good or bad, one's relationship with a free people is more healthy than with a subjected people", he declares (532).<sup>30</sup>

What then, is Leiris' attitude towards ethnography? Even as he is travelling and collecting data in Africa, he denounces the links that ethnography keeps with colonialism. As we have already stated, like all the surrealists, he is categorically opposed to colonialism. "To collect taxes, such is the main preoccupation. Pacification and medical assistance have only one purpose: to coax people into paying taxes without any resistance. [...] Ethnographic studies - for what purpose? To be able to conduct a more cunning policy which will be likely to produce greater taxes" (169).<sup>31</sup> So, in 1933, Leiris denounced ethnography because of its links with colonialism.

Some seventeen years later, after World War II, at the time of nationalist movements in Africa, his views changed. He reconciled himself with ethnography to which he then ascribed an important role: not to enable "civilised" men to know themselves better, but to revalorise cultures which had been unjustly underrated. He believed ethnography could give young nations "a basis for building their own future and [...] provide them with unchallengeable documents to support all their claims" (4).<sup>32</sup> So, in 1950, Leiris ascribed an important role to his ethnographic notes, his modest contribution to the knowledge of Africa.

But in 1981, disappointed by the continent's drift after 20 years of independence, Leiris confesses in the preamble to his third edition that the testimonial of his journal must only be considered as a "phantasm" by the people on whom the future of the new Africa largely depends (4). It was, indeed, a "Phantom Africa" which his notebooks of 1931-1933 had presented. Africa's leaders needed a stronger basis for the building of their nations than the one he had provided. Still, although his ethnographic notes had offered little to solve problems of nationhood and to foster national pride, as he had somewhat ambitiously hoped, Leiris' journal provides a valuable insight into surrealist ethnographic activities and attitude to Africa.

#### Notes

1. Hereafter numbers in parentheses refer to *Afrique fantôme* (1981).
2. All translations from the French are the author's. "Écrivant subjectivement, j'augmente la valeur de mon témoignage, en montrant qu'à chaque instant, je sais à quoi m'en tenir sur ma valeur comme témoin" (213).
3. "C'est en poussant à l'extrême le particulier que, bien souvent, on touche au général; en exhibant le coefficient personnel au grand jour, qu'on permet le calcul de l'erreur; en portant la subjectivité à son comble qu'on atteint l'objectivité" (213).
4. "Emportant ces objets, c'eût été la vie du pays que nous eussions emportée" (125).
5. "... il est convenu que cette nuit, Schaeffner et moi, nous irons nous en emparer" (128).
6. "Affreux chantage!" (82).
7. "... la vapeur du sacrilège commence réellement à nous monter à la tête et [...] d'un bond, nous nous trouvons jetés sur un plan de beaucoup supérieur à nous-mêmes" (82).
8. "Mon cœur bat très fort car, depuis le scandale d'hier, je perçois avec plus d'acuité l'énormité de ce que nous commettons" (83).

9. "objet dont la découverte pourrait amener ni plus ni moins qu'un massacre" (469).
10. "Ce qui me pousse quant à moi, c'est l'idée de la profanation" (84).
11. "... je constate avec une stupeur qui, un certain temps après seulement, se transforme en dégoût, qu'on se sent tout de même joliment sûr de soi lorsqu'on est un blanc et qu'on tient un couteau dans sa main ..." (83).
12. "On ne pouvait voir les icônes abyssiniennes qu'en s'accroupissant et à la lumière d'un briquet" (Malraux 1976: 303).
13. "Aux officiels [...] qui estimerait que décidément nous en prenons trop à notre aise dans nos transactions avec les nègres, il serait aisé de répondre que, tant que l'Afrique sera soumise à un régime aussi inique que celui de l'impôt, des prestations et du service militaire sans contre-partie, ce ne sera pas à eux de faire la petite bouche à propos d'objets enlevés ou achetés à un trop juste prix" (89-90).
14. "ces nègres sont tous les mêmes" [...] il n'y a de bon pour les faire marcher que les coups de trique" (172).
15. "souvent [...] pour des crimes qui ne sont crimes qu'à nos yeux" (173).
16. "Ces hommes, peut-être pas spécialement sympathiques, mais en tout cas pas plus stupides ni plus mauvais que tous les autres, les traiter ainsi sous couleur de civilisation, quelle honte!" (173).
17. "...je me sens très séparé, très saint, très élu" (443).
18. "Il faut vraiment que ce soit le zar qui mange, non le 'cheval', car je ne me serais jamais soupçonné une telle capacité" (443).
19. "Pauvres *awolya*, combien doit-il falloir qu'ils se battent les flancs pour parvenir à leurs transes, à leur folie de pacotille ..." (401).
20. "Les zar [...] ne me sont plus que des parents ..." (401).
21. "L'humanité à l'aube de temps [...] sans civilisation" (Gide 1930: 21).
22. "... le cerveau gourde et stagnant, le plus souvent dans une nuit épaisse" (Gide 1954: 765).
23. "Plus ou moins enfoui sous les sédiments patiemment apportés par la culture, se trouve le moi 'barbare' qu'il est fascinant de retrouver à l'état natif" (Gide 1988: 35).
24. "Merveilleux sauvages, si nonchalants, si inattendus, en même temps que si étonnamment pareils à ceux qu'on imagine ..." (223).
25. "Voici enfin l'AFRIQUE, la terre des 50 à l'ombre, des convois d'esclaves, des festins cannibales, des crânes vides, de toutes les choses qui sont mangées, corrodées, perdues" (225).
26. "un monument biblique" (434).
27. "Le voyage ne nous change que par moments. La plupart du temps, vous restez tristement pareil à ce que vous aviez toujours été" (181).
28. "pleine existence" (3).
29. "... une science humaine reste une science et l'observation détachée ne saurait, à elle seule, amener le contact; peut-être, par définition, implique-t-elle même le contraire, l'attitude d'esprit propre à l'observateur étant une objectivité impartiale ennemie de toute effusion" (8).
30. "Bons ou mauvais, l'on a des rapports plus sains avec des gens libres qu'avec des gens sous tutelle" (532).
31. "Faire rentrer l'impôt, telle est la grande préoccupation. Pacification, assistance médicale n'ont qu'un but: amadouer les gens pour qu'ils se laissent faire et payent l'impôt. [...] Étude ethnographique dans quel but: être à même de mener une politique plus habile qui sera mieux à même de faire rentrer l'impôt" (169).
32. "...fournir aux gens qu'on étudie des données pour la construction d'un avenir qui leur sera propre et [...] produire des pièces difficilement récusables à l'appui de leurs revendications" (4).

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